

Leafy spurge

What it is

Leafy spurge is a noxious weed native to Eurasia that has spread west across the United States over the past century.

How to ID it

Nicknamed leafy “scourge,” this 2- to 4-foot-tall plant has long, slender leaves and clusters of yellowish-green flowers nestled in cupped structures known as bracts. Stems, flowers, and leaves emit a white, milky sap when broken. This is one of the earliest plants to emerge in spring and among the last to become dormant in the fall, when the leaves turn reddish brown.

Where it’s found

Leafy spurge invades pastures, grasslands, roadsides, and stream banks across Montana. It grows in full to part sun in a wide range of soil types and moistures but is especially aggressive in dry sites.

Why we hate it

Stands of leafy spurge crowd out native vegetation. The weed is inedible to wildlife and toxic to cattle and horses.

How it spreads

Each plant produces large clumps of shoots from extensive underground stems and roots, allowing it to quickly dominate other vegetation. To make matters worse, each plant produces

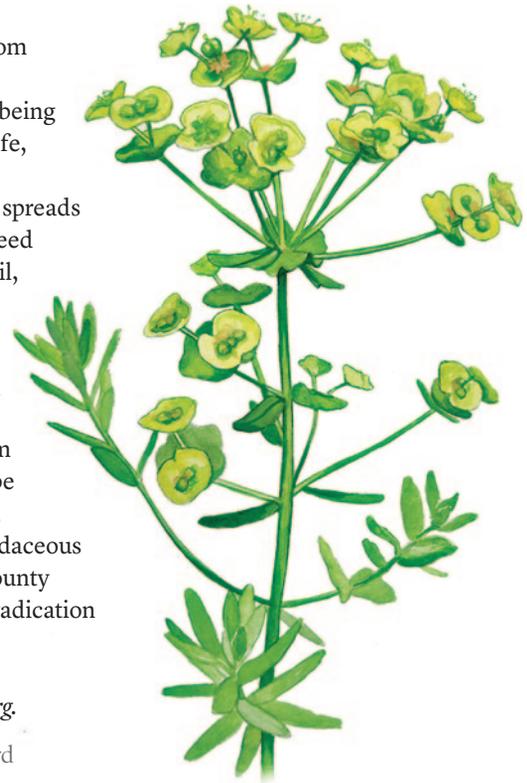
seeds that “explode” from seedpods, spreading up to 15 feet in addition to being carried farther by wildlife, wind, floodwaters, and vehicles. The plant also spreads in commercial mulch, feed grains, crop seed, topsoil, and gravel.

How to control it

Young seedlings can be hand-pulled. But once an extensive root system develops, stands must be treated with herbicides, targeted grazing, or predaceous insects. Consult your county weed coordinator for eradication instructions.

Learn more at mtweed.org.

Illustration by Liz Bradford



A quick look at concepts and terms commonly used in fisheries, wildlife, or state parks management.

Cutthroat and rainbow trout “hybridization”

One of the biggest challenges to conserving Montana’s native cutthroat trout (westslope and Yellowstone) is preventing or reducing hybridization with non-native rainbow trout.

The problem with hybridization, or crossbreeding, is that it reverses millions of years of evolutionary isolation and specialization between species. Not only that, but multiple studies have provided evidence that cutthroat trout have higher survival and reproductive success in their native range than rainbows and hybrid “cutt-bows.”

FWP’s responsibility to protect native species as part of Montana’s natural heritage requires working to reduce unnatural (human-caused) hybridization among species, especially when caused by historical management activities like fish stocking. Over the past century, the distribution of westslope cutthroat across the West has dropped to less than 10 percent of its historic range, due to habitat loss, competition from non-native brook trout, and rainbow trout hybridization.

THE MICRO MANAGER



An angler releases a cutt-bow trout caught in the upper Clark Fork River.

One way to protect native stocks is to build barriers that keep rainbows from moving upstream into some of the last cutthroat strongholds. Another is to use natural, temporary fish-killing compounds to remove all rainbows and hybrids from a stream or lake and then stock it with nonhybridized cutthroats. ■